

Course Review: Aspen Lakes Golf Course

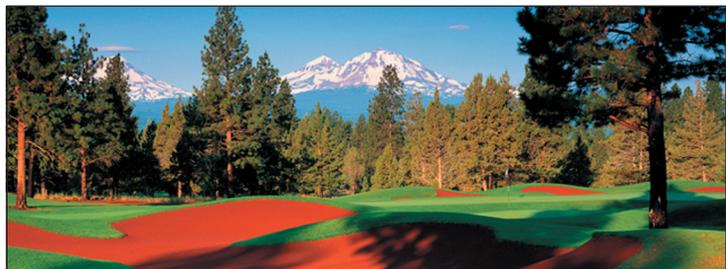
You can't talk about Aspen Lakes Golf Course without spending some time simply talking about how it *looks*, so let's just go ahead and do that first before we talk about how it plays.

Aspen Lakes, located about three miles outside of Sisters on the road to Redmond, is truly one of the most spectacular courses in Oregon from a scenery standpoint. The course is always meticulously groomed, but the most distinctive feature, of course, is the red "sand" traps. Yes, Aspen Lakes is *that* course. There are pictures of Aspen Lakes that don't even look real; it can be that stunning.

But for all that, we think it's the mountains that make Aspen Lakes. Architect William Overdorf designed Aspen Lakes so that one of Central Oregon's signature mountain peaks is in the background of virtually every hole — Mt. Bachelor, Broken Top, the Three Sisters and others. Lush green fairways, red sand traps and snow-capped mountains make for an astounding visual combination. There are so many gorgeous Central Oregon courses that it's hard to pick one as No. 1 — but Aspen Lakes is it.

OK, so how does Aspen Lakes *play*? Very well. It's a challenging course, but fair. The course is filled with mature trees, mostly pines, but most fairways are wide enough to accommodate reasonable hooks or slices. Aspen Lakes is set on a gently rolling terrain that's easily walkable unless length and the thin Central Oregon High Desert bother you. The white/blue/black tees measure 6500/6900/7300 yards, respectively — but again, the elevation will add yards to most of your shots. Generally speaking the greens are large and fast.

You do have to show some stamina at Aspen Lakes. The front nine will challenge you in many ways. (It's called "Hope," by the way; the back nine is "Faith."



Sorry, that's just too cheesy.) Then you take a deep breath, and No. 10 is a big par 5 with water all around the green. You keep plugging away, challenged each hole, when you come to the tough stretch of Holes 14-16. No. 14 is a 454-yard par 4 (!) from the whites, framed by pine trees on both sides. No. 15 is 162 from the whites, but a much tougher par 3 at 201 from the blues — with two separate lakes to avoid. Then No. 16 is another 400-yard par 4, with water on the left and a series of fairway traps on the left. It's quite the gauntlet. No. 17 is relatively benign in comparison, but No. 18 is no picnic, a 527-yard par 5 that gives you one last round of fairway red sand traps right in the area you want to land your tee and second shots.

A word about the red traps. It's not sand in those bunkers, it's local crushed volcanic rock. And while it makes for a beautiful and distinctive visual feature, be forewarned it can be hard on your clubs. It's not unheard of for people playing non-competitive rounds to simply lift and drop out of the traps to save their irons from scratching.

We'd be remiss not to mention that Aspen Lakes is also one of Oregon's most eco-friendly courses. It was the 39th U.S. course to be accredited with Audubon International's Signature Program for golf courses. There is water and marshland throughout the track, making the course a mini-wildlife refuge.

Aspen Lakes boasts a great practice area, a beautiful natural wood clubhouse and both an excellent full restaurant and snack bar. It's one of Don's Top 5 courses, and a must-do experience.